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SUBJECT: TRI-PARTITE ALLIANCE INFIGHTING HEATS UP

1. (SBU) Summary: Recent harsh and public disagreements between President Mbeki and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) over Zimbabwe, Black Economic Empowerment, and COSATU's political role have highlighted long-simmering tensions within the ruling alliance. In the near term, these tensions will likely dissipate as soon as cooler heads prevail. Differences will become harder to reconcile in the future, however, when a younger generation of leaders, who lack cross-cutting allegiances and memories of the struggle, come to the fore. End Summary.

2. (U) Several issues over the past two months have fostered rancor between COSATU and the ANC. First was the late October expulsion of a COSATU delegation from Zimbabwe. Rather than defend COSATU and its right to observe how Zimbabwe's political and economic situation has affected its sister labor organizations, President Mbeki condemned COSATU's trip as unsanctioned political adventurism and accused the organization of meddling in the political arena. A second area of contention was the government's early November announcement that it was awarding a 15% stake to a black empowerment consortium that included ANC heavyweight and spokesman Smuts Ngonyama as an advisor. COSATU blasted the deal both out of opposition to the principle of privatizing Telkom's services but also because it reeked of political cronyism.

3. (U) Rhetoric on both sides turned even more pointed after Archbishop Desmond Tutu's late November lecture in which he accused the President of fostering a culture of political sycophancy within the ANC and attacked Black Economic Empowerment for helping only a small black elite. COSATU Secretary General Zwelinzima Vavi echoed similar sentiments, leading Ngonyama to call Vavi "highly reckless and highly impetuous." This in turn led COSATU to issue a public statement that the alliance is not working properly and assert that it has every right to participate in political discussions, with COSATU President Willie Madisha saying, "...we are not an extension of a political party. We are an independent COSATU." COSATU spokesmen meanwhile told the Consul General in Johannesburg and Laboff that they believed Ngonyama's dual status as ANC spokesman and principal beneficiary of the Telkom BEE deal may have added to the shrillness of the ANC's criticism and proved their contention that the mixing of politics with private business interests was not in the public interest. Both sides say they are likely to meet soon to thrash out their differences, although no date has been set and the public arguments continue.

4. (U) The third member of the alliance, the South African Communist Party (SACP) has largely been quiet in this debate, except for calling on both sides to settle their differences and lending support to COSATU for its Zimbabwe visit. However, earlier this week SACP Deputy Secretary General Jeremy Cronin confirmed that the party will consider proposals to mount independent electoral challenges rather than run its candidates under an ANC banner. Cronin noted that while there were no guarantees that any proposals for autonomy would be adopted, the issue was a legitimate one to discuss and that there was nothing "dissident or inherently disloyal" about it.

PROMINENT ANC ACADEMIC SEES MORE SMOKE THAN FIRE

5. (SBU) Emboffs last week met with Raymond Suttner, an academic and longtime ANC insider, to discuss the latest cleavages in the alliance. Suttner, a member of the SACP since 1971, spent nearly 10 years in prison during the 1970s and 1980s for his political activities as well as a significant portion of time underground. After the ANC was unbanned, he was elected to the party's decisionmaking National Executive Committee in 1991. He later served as a member of Parliament from 1994 to 1997 and then Ambassador to Sweden from 1997 until 2001. Since that time he has focused largely on academic pursuits, publishing several articles about the history of the ANC and the alliance.

6. (SBU) Although he claimed to be out of step with current goings-on within the alliance, Suttner brought up several salient points relating to the state of the alliance today. First and foremost, Suttner stated that while the ANC has always been committed to multipartyism and the concept of the

alliance, the party (and Mbeki in particular) does not appreciate campaigns outside its structures, like COSATU's trip to Zimbabwe. Such acts are viewed as politically undisciplined and fly in the face of the culture of cooperation and consensus that are key to alliance unity. Furthermore, while the alliance is ostensibly a partnership, the ANC clearly sees itself as first among equals, which exacerbates tensions with COSATU and the SACP.

17. (SBU) Despite these tensions, however, Suttner thought the latest round of infighting, while noteworthy for its harsh rhetoric, was likely to be a tempest in a teapot. Suttner noted that senior members of the three organizations all have cross-cutting allegiances and identities—for example, a SACP member does not only view himself in those terms, but also takes into account relationships forged during the struggle while underground, in prison, or in a group like the United Democratic Front. Older members who have these complex relationships are concerned about the state of the alliance and will likely work to ensure that this latest round of infighting does not escalate further. Besides, the three sides need one another—the ANC needs the membership base and left-wing credentials of its partners, while the SACP and COSATU rely on the ANC's political clout. Suttner was convinced that saner heads would prevail before something irreparable occurred.

18. (SBU) Suttner's concern, however, was what happens once the older generation leaves the scene. Many people, he said, are joining the ANC nowadays in large part for the internal connections that membership brings, such as jobs and contracts. Few of these newcomers remember the struggle-era linkages that forged the alliance in the first place, and it is Suttner's worry that in the future, younger leaders will be more hesitant to compromise, potentially putting the alliance in grave danger. Still, he thought such a situation was still a few years out in the future and that the alliance would in the meantime remain alive, if not as robust as it once was.

19. (SBU) Comment: While COSATU is prepared to make peace with the ANC, it also has announced its intention of returning to Zimbabwe in late January to complete the fact-finding mission it aborted in October. If the ANC decides not to support this visit, another spat is likely to occur. Another disagreement may also happen within the next six months, when the Telkom shares currently held by the government workers' pension fund are to be sold to the BEE consortium. Should the shares have declined in value, both COSATU and other trade unions representing the government workers are likely to criticize the SAG and ANC. End Comment.
FRAZER